

Canada's first four perfin: the very scarce Small Queen issues

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Perfins were unofficially in use in Canada from 1885. In 1895 Canada officially authorized their use for identification purposes. The timing of their use coincided with the Small Queen issue (1870-1897).

The history and technical details of perfin production are treated in *Canadian Stamps and Perforated Initials* by Johnson and Tomasson, so will not be detailed here. Rather, the purpose here is to expand on some of the information described in that reference.

Four firms were the first to use perfins in Canada and the only ones whose perfins appear on the Small Queen issue.

- W. J. Gage Co., Toronto (W.J.G.) - W10.
- Intercolonial Railroad, Montreal (IC/R) - I1
- Sun Life Assurance Co. of Canada, Montreal (S.L./Aco.) - S13
- J. H. Stiles of Montreal (J.H./S.) - J6

The W.J.G. perfin was first seen in 1889, the others in 1893.

Rarity Factors

The rarity factors listed in Johnson & Tomasson of all the early perfins are much too conservative, since they include perfins on



The only four Canadian perfins known on the Small Queen issue: from left, W. J. Gage, Intercolonial Railroad, Sun Life Assurance, and J. H. Stiles.

stamps other than the Small Queen issue. If we look at the scarcity of the perfins on the Small Queens, consider these factors:

1. The W.J. Gage is the most common, with fewer than 1,000 in total, most of which are not on the Small Queens.
2. The Intercolonial Railway is the next common, with a rarity factor of C, or no more than 30 reported.

3. The Sun Life perfins have been reported to have a rarity factor F, or less than 1,000, almost all of which are not on the Small Queens.

4. The J. H. Stiles perfin also has a rarity factor of C, or 30 or fewer reported.

The Sun Life and the J. H. Stiles perfins are, in fact, so scarce on the Small Queen issue that few collectors report ever having seen either of them.

Complicating Factors Affecting Rarity

Production of the nineteenth century Canadian perfins is perhaps best described as haphazard. The perfins exist inverted, backwards, sideways, and doubled, meaning that they were impressed on the stamps from the front or the back and positioned at each side and the approximate center of the stamps. In fact, some were positioned off center on the stamps. Considering those variables, it is easy to describe at least 20 possible variations.

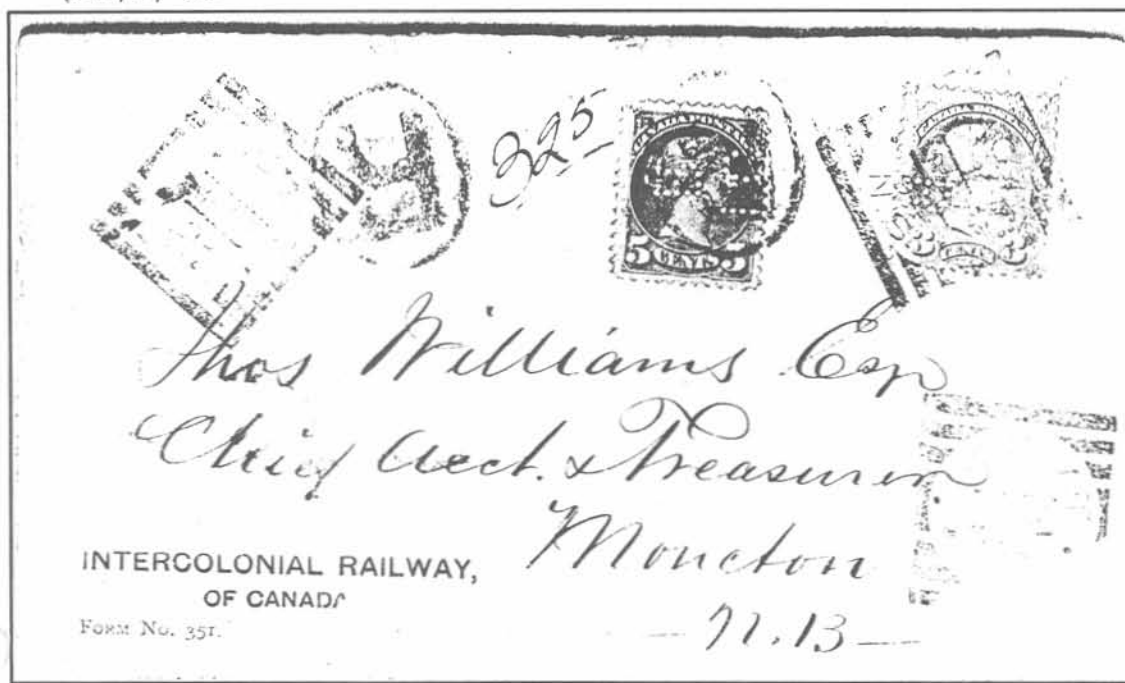
The Small Queen perfins on cover are scarce or even rare, probably having a factor of B (fewer than 30 reported) or better.

Precancels on perfins of the issue have been reported.

References

1. Arken, George B., *Canada's Small Queen Era 1870-1897*, 1980, Vincent Graves Greene Philatelic Research Foundation, pp. 408-411.
2. Johnson, J.C. & Tomasson, G., *Canadian Stamps With Perforated Initials*, 4th Ed., 1985, The Untrade Press.

We are indebted to Ron Ribler for writing this article on the Small Queens exclusively for the *Bulletin*—and to Herb Ashendorf for suggesting the idea.



The cover shown above reveals the IC/R reversed. This cover may be the only example of the reversed ICR perfin on cover.